

Philosophy of Career and Technical Education

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Abstract

This paper is a reflection on what I, Robert J. (Bob) Leahy, Jr., learned about the principles of Career and Technical Education (CTE). This is with keeping in mind the discussions I had, and papers I wrote, while a student in the CTE 502 Principles of Career & Technical Education Online Course. It is an articulation of my CTE philosophy of education.

Philosophy of Career and Technical Education

I have been involved in training and education, formally and informally, for more than 30 years and have a unique and complementary blend of experience and training in corporate, government and military environments. Until recently I had not been formally introduced to the area of Career and Technical Education (CTE), and I find this an area I desire to pursue both personally and professionally.

Core Principles of CTE

According to the Association for Career & Technical Education (2013) “Today’s cutting-edge, rigorous and relevant career and technical education (CTE) prepares youth and adults for a wide range of high-wage, high-skill, high-demand careers.” The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 formally defines CTE as:

The term ‘career and technical education’ means organized educational activities that—

(A) offer a sequence of courses that—

(i) provides individuals with coherent and rigorous content aligned with challenging academic standards and relevant technical knowledge and skills needed to prepare for further education and careers in current or emerging professions;

(ii) provides technical skill proficiency, an industry-recognized credential, a certificate, or an associate degree; and

(iii) may include prerequisite courses (other than a remedial course) that meet the requirements of this subparagraph; and

(B) include competency-based applied learning that contributes to the academic knowledge, higher-order reasoning and problem-solving skills, work attitudes, general

employability skills, technical skills, and occupation-specific skills, and knowledge of all aspects of an industry, including entrepreneurship, of an individual.

CTE is a planned program of courses and learning experiences. It begins with the exploration of career options, supports basic academic and life skills, and enables achievement of high academic standards. CTE also encourages advanced and continuing education.

With these definitions in mind, it is important to note that this education can be found at public and private institutions to include middle schools, secondary schools, and post-secondary institutions (community colleges, technical colleges, technical schools, four-year colleges and universities).

Legislatively and Politically Managing and Leading our Federal and State Workforce Education Systems into the New Century

As I make the transition from my current career to that of CTE, it is my intention to monitor the College and Career Ready (CCR) Division in the Center for Innovation and Improvement (State of Illinois) as one way to remain current in the field to maintain a viable career and technical education program. The CCR provides leadership and technical assistance to local districts and regional staff to support quality CCR programs, career development and academic improvement in the five CCR areas of Agricultural Education, Business, Marketing and Computer Education, Family and Consumer Sciences, Health Science Technology, and Technology and Engineering Education (Industrial).

Historical Leaders who have Contributed to Career and Technical Education

George Santayana's "Those who cannot remember the past, are condemned to repeat it" or Sir Winston Churchill's "Those that fail to learn from history, are doomed to repeat it" quotes apply to the discipline of Career and Technical Education. Though some of the arguments and

struggles of the past may no longer be experienced, there are others that still continue today. Not only must we overcome current challenges, but not allow those of the past to return. Dr. Charles Prosser's seventh theorem of "Vocational education will be effective in proportion as the instructor has had successful experiences in the application of skills and knowledge to the operations and processes he undertakes to teach" is as valid today as it was in 1925, but with an addendum. It is not enough just being a subject matter expert or expert practitioner, but the instructor must also be experienced in the pedagogical and andragogical approaches to instruction.

The Role and Responsibility of the Workforce Instructor in new Initiatives and Issues in CTE

Workforce instructors, trainers, instructional designers, etc. all have input on new and updated initiatives and issues in CTE. They not only need to be up-to-date with existing programs, but need to be the leaders of, or prepared for, future needs. Programs of study (POS) are not cast in stone. Existing ones can, and should be, updated to reflect the changes (new or updated technology, practices and procedures, rules and regulations, etc.) of the various employment fields. New POS need to be developed for emerging fields. A study of the labor market's supply and demand is important to identify those employment fields that warrant more emphasis and create POS to address those fields.

Connections to Established Philosophies

According to Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski (2008):

It is essential that all educators understand their primary philosophical view-points that are usually developed from a number of philosophies and exercise an eclectic approach to solving educational problems and thus provide themselves with an increase

understanding go the views of others and a wider range of things to choose from in coming up with the best solution to an educational problem. (p. 416).

I am eclectic in many ways from music, to my various careers, to my unconventional life-long learning pursuit. It is no surprise that my educational philosophy is also eclectic. Having reviewed the definition of the major philosophies, I find parts of my personal beliefs regarding people and education in just about every one of them. I would say the two major philosophies that I most identify with are Pragmatism and Progressivism.

I am one who believes that knowledge is gained through problem solving and working through things. I was fortunate to have teachers and mentors early on in my life that taught and mentored me by following the Chinese proverb of “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” These individual were at least partially practicing pragmatism, and I adopted many of those beliefs. Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski (2008) tell us that “Pragmatism views knowledge as a process in which reality is constantly changing. Learning is viewed as a transaction between the learner and the environment, and both entities are in a constant state of change” (p. 396).

From my own prior learning and experience I find that students come with their own unique set of prior knowledge, learning styles, skills, and experiences. One size does not fit all. The same is true for subject matter or programs. What may work effectively for one may not for work for another.

The progressivism philosophy of education stresses experiential learning, the scientific method, and intrinsic motivation. Progressivists emphasize that individual instruction, progress, and change are fundamental to a person’s education. They use informality in the classroom, and include group discussions and laboratories as instructional techniques. They believe that people

learn best from what they consider most relevant to their lives, and center their programs on the needs, experiences, interests, and abilities of the students.

Summary

When I entered secondary school 38 years ago, the school's focus was on graduating and college preparation. As far as I know there was no formal CTE program in that school or district. The technical high schools I had heard about at that time (we had none in our district) were the place where students who "couldn't handle" traditional high school and were not considered "college bound" were sent. That is certainly not their mission today. In fact, two of the schools I was somewhat familiar with, and are now called [Lake County High Schools Technology Campus](#) and [Technology Center of DuPage](#) (both are nearby other county schools), are quite competitive to get into, have waiting lists, and also include dual-enrollment programs with their local community colleges.

An interesting thing I now find is that the path I forged for myself from secondary school to career choices and post-secondary schooling reflects what many CTE programs are attempting for students today. My original intent was the traditional secondary school to college approach (in my case, the U.S. Naval Academy for their electrical engineering program), but was sidelined by circumstances beyond my control. Instead I enlisted in the U.S. Army after high school, received CTE type education and experience there, and transitioned back to the civilian world and post-secondary education. My life-long learning pursuit now has me at the post-graduate level.

I believe that my personal CTE type experience made me more prepared and successful in post-secondary education and reflects in my successful careers. I also believe that a CTE pathway can benefit others as it has for me. I would like to enable others to be as successful and

give them some direction (but as a pragmatist, not all the answers). Not only will students receive benefits that can result in “high-wage, high-skill, high-demand careers”, but our society also benefits with skilled and productive citizens.

References

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